

County home administrator lays out goals

Wojkiewicz emphasizes teamwork, quality care

By MATTHEW McCORMICK
Staff Writer

Though he has learned many lessons in his 17 years in the profession, Sullivan County Health Care's Scott Wojkiewicz says one stands out above all the rest: a nursing home cannot be run by a single person.

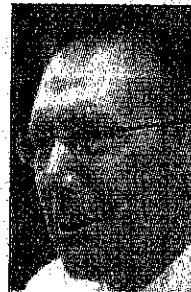


Unity

"Everyone needs some help," Wojkiewicz said in an interview on Tuesday. "It's hard to be an expert on every area out there. You need to rely on people who know more in that specific area than yourself."

That is a management philosophy that Wojkiewicz, who took over for former administrator Courtney Marshal, shares with his employer for the past decade, Pennsylvania-based Genesis HealthCare. He began his new duties Sept. 25 after spending 10 years at the Laurel Center Nursing Home in Bedford, N.H.

It is also a philosophy that county manager Ed



Wojkiewicz

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Gil de Rubio credits with the financial turnaround of the county nursing home over the past two years.

As part of Genesis' \$450,000 annual contract with Sullivan County, the company sends a slew of experts knocking on Wojkiewicz's door each month to offer advice and assistance in matters ranging from nutrition and nursing to marketing and maintenance.

Such help is essential if a nursing home administrator is to keep pace with changes to state and federal guidelines and clinical practices, he said. Given their importance, Wojkiewicz said he would have to look to outside help from consultants, whether he was employed by Genesis or not.

"Administrators are too busy providing quality care to our patients and just keeping the facility running," Wojkiewicz said. "To keep up with all the changes in the state, all the changes with Medicare, with the federal government and everything else that's coming down is nearly impossible," he said.

When Genesis took over management of the county nursing home in January 2005, it used its employees' expertise to change the nursing home's financial situation.

Part of what the company did was cut unnecessary expenses, such as temporary nurses hired from outside agencies. The practice was stopped this June. Gil de Rubio said it was part of the reason the nursing home's human resource budget was overspent by \$750,000 one year.

Other parts had to do with applying knowledge in marketing and navigating the complexities of Medicare reimbursement, which allowed the facility to generate revenue using the license it obtained in 2002 to offer skilled care, said Gil de Rubio.

"The commissioners and I made a conscious effort to take the nursing home off the county

tax rolls. We had to deal with the facility as though it were an entrepreneurial enterprise," Gil de Rubio said. "We had to go out and sell the nursing home because for a long time it was the old county home where people went to die. So we had to change the image."

Largely due to the company's efforts, he said, the nursing home's total population jumped from 118 in 2005 to more than 150 today and its skilled care patients increased from zero to nearly 30 at some times.

Since Medicare reimburses the nursing home \$440 a day for residents requiring skilled care, compared to just \$140 a day for Medicaid patients, those numbers have been a financial boon to the facility. After two years of \$1 million-plus deficits, the nursing home in 2005 was just \$228,000 in the red, and by June 2006 was running a surplus of more than \$43,000.

But what Gil de Rubio calls Genesis' "tremendous success" at the nursing home is not just about the bottom line. Nor is

Wojkiewicz's job simply to implement whatever policy the company recommends.

"When Courtney left it gave us the opportunity ... to find a manager who could manage the manager," said Gil de Rubio. "We need someone there who works for Genesis as a manager but can stand up to corporate Genesis and say 'Hey, listen, it's good for corporate Genesis but

it's not good for Sullivan County.' Scott is that type of individual."

"As a licensed administrator, I have a duty to the staff and the residents within that facility," Wojkiewicz said. "That's where my main focus is, to provide quality care for the residents in that facility and run a good building."

So far, Wojkiewicz, "Phonetically it's pronounced 'voit-kay-vich,'" he said, likes what he has seen.

"The nurses are very strong, clinically, they have a very good knowledge of care issues, a good

nurse practitioner in the facility and good docs that come into the facility," Wojkiewicz said.

Of course, there always is room for improvement. In the future, Wojkiewicz said he may look into other revenue streams such as providing respite care and hospice care and also would look into streamlining the facility's administration.

But in the short term, he

said he would be spending time to get to know the nursing home inside and out so that he can better focus his energy in the future.

"I've only been there for three weeks," Wojkiewicz said. "Give me a month and I'll tell you where we need to go in a year."

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